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INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Letter dated 10 April 2000 from the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-sixth session

I have the honour to transmit to you the report on the integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective in the Dominican Republic.*

I would be grateful if this report could be circulated as an official document of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Human Rights.

(Signed) Rhadys Abreu de Polanco
Ambassador

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* The annex is reproduced in the language of submission and English only.

Annex

All human rights instruments contain as their basic premise, stemming from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the equality of human beings (men and women), from which it is clear that the interpretation and implementation of treaties must conform to this principle of equality.

At the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), the conclusion was reached that it does not matter how good or how valid international agreements and conventions on women may be if there are no national mechanisms for implementing policies and action plans to carry them out.

The Dominican Republic has initiated people-centred policies and work on gender equality as an end in itself and not just as a means of eliminating poverty.

Of the 12 areas established in Beijing, the Dominican Republic can show, inter alia, the following results:

- The World Conference on Human Rights stressed in particular the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women. With this in view, the Dominican Republic, which is a signatory to the Convention of Belém do Pará, passed Act No. 24-97 introducing substantive changes to the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure and new legal classifications, including gender violence, domestic or intra-family violence, incest, sexual aggression and rape.

- Specialized services have been established to help women survivors of violence by using various strategies, including "advocacy" (negotiation, promotion and political pressure).

- In February 1997 the Department of Non-Violence was established, attached to the Secretariat of State for Women. This Department give psychological support to needy women, girls and adolescents whose rights have been violated, and particularly when they are victims of violence. It receives support from international agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and OAS. The staff of the Department of Non-Violence are at present coordinating the Women's Support Network against Violence.

- In November 1998, President Leonel Fernández established the National Commission to Prevent and Combat Intra-family Violence, composed of governmental bodies and the Coordinating Body for Women's NGOs.

- A consciousness-raising campaign was conducted by what is now the Secretariat of State for Women, in the form of a world-wide mailing of 600,000 letters about a crime that jolted the national conscience - the murder of three Dominican ladies (Patria, Minerva and María Teresa Mirabal) along with their driver, Rufino de la Cruz, by henchmen of the tyrannical regime in November 1960. The deaths of the three most distinguished heroines of this century led to the proclamation

by the United Nations of 25 November as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in honour of the Mirabal sisters. Many, many thanks to those who made this honour possible.

Another area that has been developed is that of women and poverty, based on the idea that promoting the development of rural women means promoting the development of the Dominican Republic, where peasants account for 40 per cent of the population, the right of women to own and inherit land is recognized. Act No. 55-97 was adopted in this regard, with a programme designed to contribute to reducing poverty indicators among rural women, raise their incomes and boost their output and participation. One of the programme's major achievements is to provide rural women with access to credit without having to be married, as was the case previously; at the present time, 73 per cent of loans in the sector are granted to women.

As regards the area of women in power and decision-making, Act No. 12-2000, adopted on 30 March 2000, stipulates that 33 per cent of elective posts in all parties must be for women. At the present time there are 24 women deputies, women account for 37 per cent of the judiciary, and there are 409 women in local government, 2 women senators and 7 female Secretaries of State.

In the area of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in the Dominican Republic, the position in respect of the Members of the United Nations is that the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) should remain in the country, bearing in mind that it is vital to maintain this centre vis-à-vis the Beijing Platform for Action, in that the training factor is extremely important in the advancement of women. We welcome the restructuring being carried out to make this body more efficient and allow access to data, especially by developing women.

On 11 August 1999, by Act No. 66-99 the Dominican Republic became the fourth country in Latin America to establish a Secretariat of State for Women. I quote the words of Mrs. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, on 8 March 2000: "International Women's Day: since its inception there has been a tension as to whether it should be a day of celebration and reflection, or a day for protest, a day for action. I think it should be all of these things. We need to reflect upon the progress that has been made in claiming rights for women, the sacrifices that have been made to force that progress, the continued need to protest at inequality and the denial of rights. It should be a day of action to build on existing strategies and to develop new ones. And, not least, it should be a day of celebration of what women working together are capable of achieving."

The Dominican Republic has been working along with governmental and non-governmental organizations and this was why, when we too celebrated International Women's Day on 8 March this year, the President of the Republic awarded the Medal of Merit 2000 to 13 eminent women in the fields of education, music, painting, theatre, literature, health, law, peasant life, etc.

As regards the Beijing +Five review in the year 2000, Dominican women will be present at the meeting to be held in June with a whole set of achievements.

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